

A youth issues FORUM

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The Y.B. City Team: How do young people relate to local Government?

Participation

Girl Guides/
Local Govt. on
the move

Employment

Evaluation of
the Employment
Access Program

Young People & Disabilities

Special Information
Lift-out

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LABOUR MARKET

Questions of Equity

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From the Youth Issues Forum, July 1986

The Employment Access Program was established in September 1985 to assist 15-21 year old young offenders, wards and institutionalised young people obtain and retain long-term training and employment opportunities

In a previous Youth Issues Forum article I noted that it had been envisaged that over a 12 month period the Program would provide appropriate models and guidelines regarding youth employment placement and advocacy, the support necessary to maintain young people in education and training, appropriate models of pre-apprenticeship training, a training module for welfare youth workers and alternative career ladders.

It was envisaged that this experience could be used to inform the policies and practices of Community Services Victoria, the Department of Labour, the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, TAFE and the Education Department.

The envisaged impacts of the Program were broad and, in retrospect, unrealistic expectations within a 12 month period. The nature and extent of these expectations reflected uncertainty as to what the Program could achieve over a 12 month period and, in the absence of certainty, a decision to list a series of possibilities. Nonetheless, the impact of the Program has been broadly threefold:

1. Direct and indirect impact on members of the target group through employment placement and retention.
2. Direct and indirect impact on policy changes.
3. Direct and indirect impact on organisational change.

What follows is a brief examination of each of these impacts. Before doing so, however, it would be useful to remind readers that the Program has three interdependent components — a Coordination Unit with three workers, five Employment Access Officers operating in six Community Services Victoria regions (Inner Urban, Barwon, Central Highlands, Inner/Outer Eastern and Western Suburbs) and an Apprenticeship Support Officer.

During the first year of the Program there was an additional project — The Workshop auspiced by the Gold Street Primary School, Clifton Hill. Funds were not provided for the continuation of this project.

Target Group Impact

The number of young people who have been in contact with the Program since its inception is 800. This is expected to increase to 1,200 by 1st September, 1987.

EMPLOYMENT

The Employment Access Program addressed a two stage of the Workforce Program by use of its staff members and by a contract service.

The Employment Access Program

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What I propose to do in this article is outline four documents:

What is the Employment Access Program?

What does the Program hope to achieve?

What is the significance of the Program?

What is the Employment Access Program?

The Employment Access Program was established in September 1985, funded by the Department of Labour and the Department of Community Services Victoria. The aim of the program is to effect long-term improvements in the access of young offenders and institutionalised youth to employment and training opportunities.

Young offenders and institutionalised youth are defined as clients of Community Services Victoria aged 15-21 years, on a Statewide Court Order such as Sentence, Youth Training Centres Sentence, Youth Protection, Youth Penitentiary, Attendance Orders, Summonses, the like, the outcome of the process of apprehension, the like, including ex-carcers and non-excarcer clients who are considered "at risk" of entering the Statutory system.

The rationale for the target group of 15-21 years is that while the young, poor, people and welfare workers are the



needs. The projects have been designed to test a variety of different strategies and to identify and change barriers which restrict the access of the target group to second employment and training options.

1. Employment Placement

Officer (ASO) is employed to implement and monitor the placement rate of the target group in the apprenticeship vacancies available with SAsAS. The ASO encompasses direct support work with target group and an educational role for employer, welfare workers and government organisations.

Between September 1985 and 30th June 1986, the total number of the target group placed in jobs, education or training was 306 with 256 placed in long term jobs, education or training. At the 30th June 1986, the total number of the target groups still in long-term jobs, education or training was estimated to be 171.

Older young people and young with a higher level of education tended to obtain and retain jobs at a higher frequency than younger people.

The Program's experience has confirmed that the quality of a job is a critical determinant of job retention. The quality of a job is not simply measured by the wages and working conditions. Equally important are the attitude and behaviour of supervisors and work colleagues, whether or not a job has a career path and the public acceptability of a job.

The most important impact of the Program on young people has been a tentative contribution towards their empowerment-access to employment and information and understanding about employment rights which may provide economic independence and promote self-esteem. The basis of this empowerment is the belief that young people are not to blame for their own unemployment and that society's institutions should change in order to create appropriate employment and training opportunities and choices. This is opposed to a competing assumption that young people are responsible for their own (un)employment and must change so that they meet the requirements of the labour market.

Of course, young people do need to understand and meet the requirements of employers. The Program, therefore, advises young people on these requirements.

The question is not whether or not there should be supportive services for these young people, but the philosophy and nature of these supportive services — a dependency or advocacy model. With due acknowledgement to the conceptual work of Concetta Benn, the differences between these approaches can be summarised as below.

These competing characteristics are broad and not exclusive. The basis of the differences between the dependency and advocacy models lies in value-laden definitions, assumptions and practices. The advocacy approach is about empowering wards, young offenders and institutionalised young people. A philosophy of change, however, does not necessarily mean a change of practice.

The realisation of an advocacy principle into an advocacy practice is limited by substantial practical constraints such as high continuing levels of unemployment, the quality of jobs, an austere level of income support for the unemployed, the work test, discriminatory employment practices, the conditioning of young people to be dependent, the responsibilities of E.A.P. workers as public servants and the relative powerlessness of members of the target group to individually impact on decision-making processes.

An ability to use the rhetoric of empowerment does not constitute evidence of its practice. It is important to distinguish, therefore, between a philosophical framework and the impacting constraints. Nonetheless, an alternative framework provides a basis for developing an alternative practice in the long-term.

The Program is working with Victoria's Youth Advocacy Network to ensure an ongoing review of its youth advocacy commitment and practices. What the Program can do is attempt to contribute towards creating a climate for youth advocacy — using advocacy principles as a guide.

Policy Impact

In establishing the Program, a Community Services Victoria and Department of Labour Inter-Departmental Committee was established to oversee the Program. Both Departments recognised that the Program's experience was critical to the further development of an employment and training strategy for wards, young offenders and institutionalised young people.

In late 1986, the I.D.C. resolved that a new policy paper should be developed — building on the previous policy development which led to the establishment of the Program. It is envisaged that this policy paper will establish a context for the development and implementation of appropriate ongoing employment and training strategies.

During 1986, the Program targeted on the access of wards, young offenders and other institutionalised young people to the Community Employment

Dependency Model Principles

- (a) Attempts to change the individual.
- (b) Problem oriented, eg: unqualified, inexperienced young unemployed.
- (c) A means of social control.
- (d) Discriminatory and discretionary as to who will get what job and training opportunities under what
- (e) Job and training alternatives imposed by professionals.
- (f) Professionals accountable to colleagues and techniques.
- (g) Decisions made by Program workers.
- (h) Welfare.

Advocacy Model Principles

- (a) Attempt to change society's institutions, eg: changing eligibility and merit requirements.
- (b) Resource oriented, eg: provision of information and supporting young people in their job and training decisions.
- (c) A means of social change.
- (d) Recognition of the right of individuals to determine their own (un)employment.
- (e) Alternatives discovered by participants.
- (f) Professionals accountable to young people.
- (g) Decisions made by young people.
- (h) Justice.

Program (CEP). CEP was targetted because it provides short-term work experience for young people, does not necessitate a long-term commitment by workers, can be more or less demanding than a regular job and provide a wider choice of jobs.

The Commonwealth Government has established CEP targets for the long-term unemployed, women, migrants with English language difficulties, Aboriginals and people with disabilities. Wards and young offenders have not constituted a CEP targetted group but have been subsumed within 'others assessed as in immediate need of employment'.

The point of being a targetted group is that specific targets for placement of persons from a target group are established. This imposes a combined responsibility on secretariats, Consultative Committees, Area Project Officers, sponsors and the CES to meet these targets. Strategies aimed at meeting targets are required including project design, project approval, referral of participants, monitoring of targets and appropriate publicising.

Together CSV and the Department of Labour proposed to the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations that a CEP target be established for wards and young offenders. The State Office of D.E.I.R. has agreed to establish a 3% target for Victoria's 1987 intake into CEP. It is expected that up to 100 young people in the target group will be placed as a result of this target.

The Program has also been supporting an initiative of CSV's Equal Opportunity Unit to access traineeships to the disadvantaged — including wards and young offenders. An approach has been made to the Department of Labour to discuss the access of disadvantaged individuals and groups to traineeships.

In response to this initiative, the Public Sector Industry Working Group on Traineeships met on 16th January, 1987. The Group is responsible for the development of traineeships within the Victorian Public Service. Its membership comprises the Department of Labour, TAFE, the Victorian Public Service Board and the Victorian Public Service Association. The meeting agreed that a discussion paper would be prepared on mechanisms for ensuring

disadvantaged groups and individuals have access to traineeships and identifying additional supports which may be necessary. This initiative complements discussions which the Department of Labour has had with community agencies on the access of disadvantaged to traineeships.

Discussions are also being organised with the Training Division of the Department of Labour to discuss the experience of the Apprenticeship Support Officer with the State Additional Apprenticeship Scheme. The focus of these discussions is to assess whether the SAAS experience of providing support for wards and young offenders has applicability to (1) other disadvantaged groups and their accessibility to SAAS and (2) the access of disadvantaged groups to regular apprenticeships.

Organisational Impact

CSV is in the process of a significant restructuring and reorientation — in particular, the shift from a 'welfare' to a 'service' department and the integration of intellectually disabled with non-intellectually disabled services.

Deinstitutionalisation is a critical policy commitment by CSV — a commitment to access mainstream services for individuals and groups who are otherwise segregated and denied access — in particular, wards, young offenders and people with intellectual disabilities. Within CSV, the deinstitutionalisation focus is on minimising the usage of institutions, developing more appropriate community-based services and the redevelopment of existing institutions.

Access to mainstream services depends on those services flexibly responding to the circumstances and needs of different individuals and groups. CSV recognises the need to recognise the impact of its deinstitutionalisation policies. A range of initiatives, therefore, are consistent with this recognition:

1. The Employment Access Program which focusses on the employment (re)integration of wards and young offenders.
2. A CSV — Ministry of Education Task Force which is examining the (re)integration of institutionalised youth into mainstream education.

CSV, Corrections, Education and TAFE I.D.C. which is examining Youth Training Centre education programmes.

3. An Open Employment Training Program which focusses on providing support and training to people with intellectual disabilities in the regular workforce.
4. The establishment of an Access and Equity in Employment and Training Forum.

The practical consequences of a deinstitutionalisation policy and practice is leading CSV into examining its relationship to mainstream activities such as employment, training and education. CSV cannot ignore the impact of its policies and practices and the accessibility of mainstream services to wards, young offenders, 'at risk' young and people who have intellectual disabilities.

The Access and Equity in Employment and Training Forum was established in August 1986. The Forum provides a basis for CSV employment-oriented initiatives to be coordinated and integrated within CSV. It is chaired by the General Manager (Policy) Peter Allen and all Divisions of CSV are represented on the Forum.

The Forum is undertaking an overall co-ordination and information exchange role and will make recommendations to the CSV Executives on:

- the equality of opportunity position CSV's consumers in the labour market as well as in specific labour market programs;
- CSV's own employment and training policies, practices and programs as they impact on disadvantaged groups;
- the equal opportunity and affirmative employment practice of the non-government organisations that CSV funds;
- the future employment and training requirements of the wider community services sector in relation to disadvantaged groups.

The Conditions for Continued Success

The Employment Access Program was established to increase and maintain long-term employment and training opportunities for young offenders, wards and institutionalised young people.

The Program is predicated on the need for equal outcomes and that this depends on different rather than the same opportunities. Providing the same opportunities will perpetuate existing inequalities.

Meeting the equity needs of different groups in the labour market necessitates the development of population-specific affirmative action policies and programs — providing different and appropriate resourcing targeted to the specific employment and training needs of specific population groups.

The Program was established, therefore, to provide different employment and training resourcing to young offenders, wards and institutionalised youth. While specialist, the Program's focus is necessarily generic — (re)integration of a group of young people into mainstream employment and training. This focus requires identifying the specific structural inequalities which restrict access to mainstream employment and training opportunities, the provision of support services and targeting carefully planned appropriate modifications to labour market opportunities and programs. Without this focus young people could be (re)integrated into mainstream inequalities. Generic services and programs are inequitable unless they respond to the different resourcing needs of population-specific groups.

The successful (re)integration of wards, young offenders and institutionalised young people means making available to all young wards, offenders and institutionalised youth patterns of life and conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to the regular circumstances and ways of life of society.

The Program's success in (re)integrating young offenders, wards and institutionalised young people is not to be judged simply by its success in maximising employment placement and retention. Its success also depends on its capacity to sustain an ongoing critique of structural inequalities, assist the development of appropriate reforms and its commitment and capacity to empower young people.

David Griffiths
February 1987

The following article is an extract from 'The Argus' of 1926, one of Melbourne's newspapers, now defunct.

It was discovered while one of the Income Unit's researchers was sorting material for her project.

We have reprinted it not only because it is quaint or because it is historical, but because the sentiments expressed in it still underlie many of the arguments about young people today. The language may be different but the sentiments are unfortunately enduring.

A glaring example is the argument about unemployment benefits, the so-called 'voluntary work for the dole' debate. (See editorial).

Yet another is the fact that the recent wage case which applied a \$10 increase across the board, will apply the increase to juniors only on a proportional basis. Whilst this isn't a new practice, it is proof again that juniors are not regarded as needing or deserving the levels of increase deemed appropriate to adults.

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A Menace to Youth

Sir John Quick, in delivering his award to Victorian railway employees in the Arbitration Court last week, refused to increase the wages of "lad porters". The pay of these boys ranges from £1/5/- a week at 14 years of age to £8/15/- at 20 years, after which they are entitled to the adult male basic wage of £4/10/6. Sir John Quick observed that he regarded these rates as fair and reasonable. Other sober-minded people will regard them as most unreasonable and most unfair to the community, for which they raise social and economic problems of the first magnitude. The whole subject of the remuneration of adolescent workers in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations demands reconsideration. The "lad porter" is by no means a singular example. Boys only a few months from school in many walks of life are receiving wages which not many years ago were those of men with family responsibilities; while business, factory, and shop girls yet in their teens are remunerated upon a scale which is a standing temptation to extravagance, thoughtlessness, and irresponsibility.

Youth will be served in this youthful age, and nobody but a "kill-joy" would have it otherwise; but let it be served with intelligent discrimination. As it stands, the whole wage scale is topsy-turvy. The young man following the laborious path of apprenticeship to a trade which shall make him a serviceable member of society is expected to be content for five, six, or seven years with a mere pittance; while the boy who elects to drift into an unskilled or semi-skilled occupation finds "easy" money and plenty of it. True, there is later a bitter harvest of disillusionment for the unskilled worker, who in times of depression is usually the first to feel the effects of unemployment,